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Daily Information Session — 14.236 MHz @ 23:30z

Adventure Annobon—3C0V *from Franz Langner, DJ9ZB*

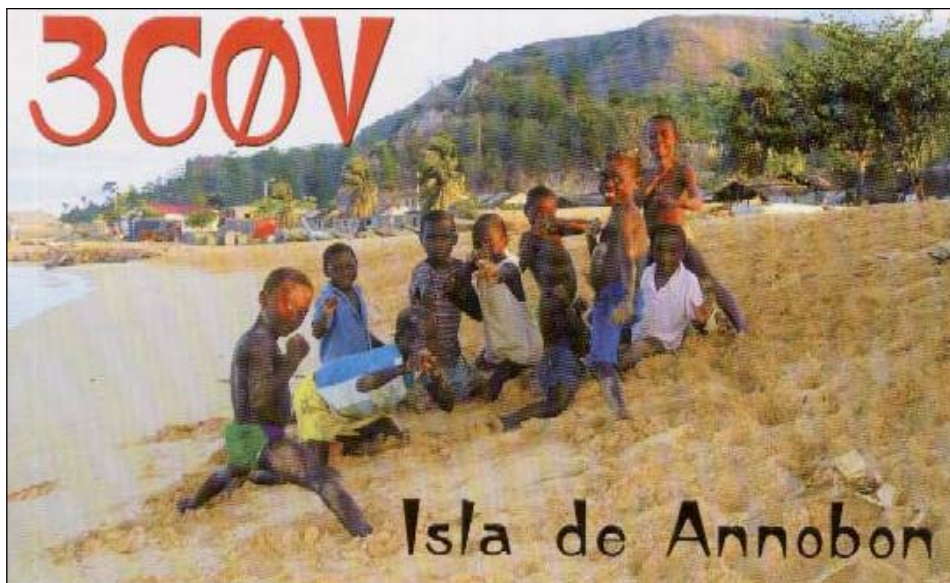
Again and again, reports of DXpeditions fascinate in a special way the sizeable group of Hams who are interested in DX. Sometimes these stories lend wings to our thoughts, awake dormant interests and desires, and expand our horizons with descriptions of foreign lands and exotic islands.

What actually draws us into the distance? What is the appeal to travel again and again into new DXCC countries? Don't we sometimes accept unnecessary risks when we activate for instance rare DXCC areas and islands far away from civilization? The selected target this time was the small island of Annobon in the Atlantic Ocean, known better to Hams with the rare prefix "3C0." Every time I looked at this small dot on my Amateur World Map I realized that the planning for, and the execution of, a DXpedition to Annobon would not be an easy undertaking.

Our DXpedition target

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is one of the smallest countries on the African continent with a size of 28,061 sq. kilometers (10,800 sq. miles) and roughly 475,000 inhabitants.

The country consists of the mainland portion and the two volcanic islands of Bioko and Annobon. From 1973 to 1981, Annobon was officially known as Pagalu.



The friendly, bright eyes of children on Annobon Island

Arrival in Equatorial Guinea

Following a very long preparation time, numerous phone calls, and many hurdles, the Ministry of Communications finally granted our Ham radio licenses and permission to enter Annobon. Elmo, EA5BYP; Vincente, EA5YN; Victor, EA5FO; and I, Franz, DJ9ZB, agreed to depart in late September 2003 and we sought the necessary entry visas from the Embassy of Equatorial Guinea in Madrid.

The departure day started very early when my XYL drove me and 185 lbs. of luggage to the airport in Strasbourg, France. After I spent lots of Euros for excess luggage fees I

departed around noon for Madrid Barajas Airport in Spain. My Spanish friends arrived a little later from Alicante on another flight. While waiting five hours to check-in for the flight to Malabo, we met with Ramon G. Salazar, 3C1GS, who wanted to join us on Annobon but, as a UN employee, was on his way to Baghdad, Iraq. We took off at 2 a.m. for Malabo.

After arrival in the old airport building in Malabo our entry visas and vaccination documents were examined and, of course, the open hand was ready for "contributions."

With the many documents we car-

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inside... WA5PAE—SK

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Azure water and white sandy beach

ried for this trip from many different authorities we were guided into a separate air-conditioned waiting room where we spent several hours. Through the window, we could see how the military examined our luggage contents and finally cleared everything to be loaded onto an old Russian Antonow-24 plane for Annobon. I tried to capture this with my camera but was instantly hindered with the words, "Tienes Permisso?" Luckily my camera was not taken away. After 4 hours of waiting we were permitted to embark our plane.

Approaching Annobon

Finally, we took off and the pilot aimed the aircraft in a southwesterly direction toward Annobon. After a 90-minute flight we overflew the island state of Sao Tome and Principe which is located directly on the equator. After another 30 minutes we started descending and the pilot approached the volcanic island of Annobon for the landing. The crew landed the plane in the main town of San Antonio de Pale.

The time came for the customs agents to introduce themselves and examine our expedition items again. As there is no customs hall everything happened outside in the rain. Finally all our stuff was released and ready for transportation on a tractor to our radio location 2 miles away.

A large group of children and adults accompanied us to our quarters, roughly 3/4 mile from the airport. Elmo, EA5BYP, and Vincente, EA5YN, were greeted warmly—they had not been back since their last

visit in September, 1999. The newly built road leads from the airport downhill to the main settlement of Antonio de Pale. Coffee brown children ran and played on the street and examined us quietly and seriously with big eyes. On the way to their huts women balanced on their heads large baskets of goods that arrived on the plane.

We could see in the distance a white sandy beach and the azure blue water of the Atlantic. On the other side we looked at oil and coco palm trees and recognized the highest island elevation—the 2000 foot high Monte de Santamina of Annobon. Besides the huts along the way a number of newly built stone houses came into view as well as a church on a small hill.

We rented living and sleeping quarters from Señor Damian for our 14-day stay. His house includes a large terrace and is located above the street reachable via a dirt path. We unloaded our suitcases and antennas and lugged everything to the building. Needless to say, it was now more than 30 hours since we departed and without sleep we were feeling tired. But there was no time to rest as our equipment needed to be unpacked and prepared for installation. However, first things first, so we accompanied Señor Damian for our visit to the acting island governor. Following that we reported to the military commandant's office with all our passports and travel documents. After greeting us he carefully examined our documents and retained our passports until our departure. He was given a description of Amateur Radio and told how long we planned to operate from the island. He seemed interested and let us know that we were the only visitors and, in contrast to Malabo, would be permitted to take photographs. On our way home 30 minutes later we saw the new president's palace being finished and a number of newly erected buildings for the military garrison.

Finally the work could begin.

Elmo and I started with the assembly of the 3-element Cushcraft—A3WS—WARC beam. With our location on the northern end of the island we had a clear shot toward Europe, the US, and Japan. Soon our YAESU FT-897 and the Toshiba Notebook PC were connected and at 1849 UTC we made our first contact as 3C0V with Elmo's brother, Gaby, OD5NJ, in Beirut on 18 MHz. Elmo reported to Gaby, one of our pilot stations, that all was OK and that for the next hour 3C0V would be active with one station only on 18 MHz.

It was then time to get something to eat and drink. Luckily water was available in imported plastic bottles. Outside it was pitch dark and only occasionally could we see a light from a flashlight, a luxury few Anno-



The 3C0V team

bonians can afford. We were told that in the near future a central power plant was going to be built. The street lights are already there, albeit not yet connected.

At 1945 UTC, 3C0V called on 18.145 MHz and listened 150 to 155



Franz, DJ9ZB, operating as 3C0V

resulting in a giant pile-up from Europe. The signals were very strong with many stations hunting for a new DXCC country or IOTA island.



Young girl balances basket on head

Around 0100 UTC we secured the FT-897 since generator noise penetrates the huts of the locals and disturbs their night's rest. During this first operation of the rig the station table was taken over by insects and mosquitoes, leaving an interesting pattern of squashed colors on the table. In this first night of longed for rest time the mosquitoes kept hounding me—I served them as a prime target.

The next morning we continued the WARC activity and during this time we interrupted our operation a few times to assemble more antennas. Victor, EA5FO, a DXpedition newcomer started RTTY on 20m and Vincente, EA5YN, commenced late afternoon on 15m CW. Our plan was to concentrate in the first week mainly on the higher bands and in the second week on the low bands.

During the Spanish colonial era roughly 80% of the population became Catholic and on Sunday morning we saw many children and adults going to church.

During the morning and evening temperatures are fairly pleasant but around noon the sun radiates from the blue sky and brings unbearable heat. Elmo accompanied me in the late afternoon on a first walk around the town and, as it turned out later, our only opportunity to take photos.

The Annobonians live in simple huts and live modest lives. The women sow, plant, and harvest vegetables, while the men go to sea daily. Fish is the main staple on the island. From the huts we heard the cheerful voices of children. We brought gifts for the kids, mainly school items like notebooks, pencils, coloring pens, etc., and they were happy to receive them. Their eyes are so real that you feel the thankfulness when you observe their happy smiles. On the beach a recently stranded ship rusts away but serves as a playground for the children. We also saw in the distance a larger transport vessel at anchor. Later we had a number of male visitors on our terrace enquiring what we were doing. Some introduced themselves as Customs and Telecom employees. This, however, interrupted our Ham communications as we were obliged to answer their many questions. After all, we were guests on their island!

The next day we had antenna problems but we were able to compensate on other bands and modes.

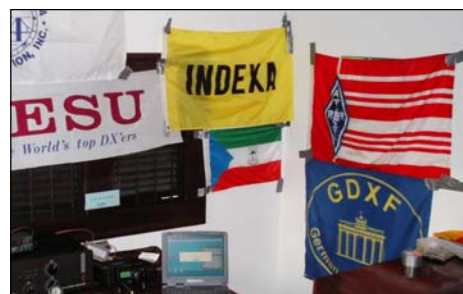
Friday morning Damian and Elmo were called to the Military Commandant in town and returned with the news that we had to stop our radio operation. They were also told we had to leave all our equipment and antennas in place. When we heard this we were shocked as there was no explanation for this demand. Maybe the military was asked to cut all uncontrolled communication from the island to the outside world? We agreed to another visit and discussion for Saturday morning, October 4, but Elmo and Damian did not have a good feeling after the visit the day before.

It was good that we had already made over 500 QSOs on 80 and 40m and were able to do a few test QSOs on 160 with the V80E antenna. What would this new day bring for us? The wind started up, dark clouds hung in the sky and the day started with rain showers. We

continued to operate while wondering what would happen. When our two team members came back we could read from their faces that it was not good news. We had no time to broadcast the news on the bands as we had to shut down immediately.

We were ordered to appear at the airport with our luggage in 2 hours and fly back to Malabo in an Antonow-24. This shocking news and the little remaining time to disassemble and pack everything kicked us into high gear—at least we wanted to take our equipment. While we were packing we saw the Antonow plane landing. Soon we were at the airport with our luggage. We received our passports and tickets which we had to pay for in addition. Now they all returned for the farewell—the children and the adults. Raymundo, who lives on the island with his wife and two small children and who would become a good friend, asked if I would come back again? I answered right away: YES!

When I returned to Strasbourg my XYL picked me up. I then spent the next 3 days in bed with a high fever. Luckily it wasn't a malarial infection!



INDEXA flag overlooks 3C0V station

We worked over 20,000 QSOs in the week of operation: 14,000 SSB, 6,500 CW, and 800 RTTY/PSK. Piles of QSL cards had already arrived.

Our heartfelt thanks goes to INDEXA and all of our supporters.

(This article was edited and condensed from the original article "Adventure Annobon" by Franz Langner, DJ9ZB. The original article was translated from German by Karl Geng, N1DL. Photos courtesy of DJ9ZB and EA5BYP.)

INDEXA vice president WA5PAE—SK



WA5PAE

On 23 November 2003 INDEXA vice president and Information Session staff member, Billy G. "Pick" Pickard, WA5PAE, became a Silent Key after losing a courageous battle with pulmonary fibrosis disease.

During his life, Pick had a distinguished military career in the Air Force. He served in Libya, Turkey, Europe, and Viet Nam before his final four-year assignment at the National Security Agency. He retired in 1977.

Pick held an Extra Class license, was an accomplished CW operator, and was a passionate DXer who was proud to be on the DXCC Honor Roll.

During his amateur radio career, he operated from Germany as DL4IZ and Guantanamo Bay as KG4MO where he made over 13,000 QSOs during three DXpeditions.

In 1997, Pick joined the staff of the INDEXA Information Session and in 2002 he was elected vice president of INDEXA where he served until his death.

Pick was also a sorter for the 8th

Area QSL Bureau and in January 2003 he accepted an appointment to be the Great Lakes Division DXAC Representative. Shortly after his death he was posthumously inducted into the Greater Cincinnati Amateur Radio Hall of Fame.

Pick is survived by his wife of 43 years, Ethel; two daughters; and three grandchildren. Condolences may be forwarded to:

Ethel Pickard
8063 Pepper Pike
West Chester, OH 45069

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